

# Helping Employees Cope After September 11<sup>th</sup>

The sudden, unexpected events of September 11<sup>th</sup> made an overwhelming impact on all Americans. For those directly affected, there were physical injuries and emotional trauma. For many others across the nation, there were no visible signs of physical injury, but the attacks have had an emotional impact that may continue for years. Not surprisingly, the anniversary of the attack may cause painful memories to resurface for many of us. This guide is intended to help managers and HR personnel help employees cope during this emotional time, and offer tips on how to memorialize the anniversary of September 11<sup>th</sup> in the workplace.

*Note*—This guide provides basic information only; if employees are having difficulty coping, refer them to their appropriate health care professional or your EAP, if you offer one. Please refer to other guides in the LifeCare® education series for additional information:

- ♦ *Coping After September 11<sup>th</sup>*
- ♦ *Grief and Bereavement*
- ♦ *Helping Others Cope With Grief*
- ♦ *Helping Children Cope With Grief*
- ♦ *Coping With the Threat of Terrorism*
- ♦ *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)*

## Coping With the Anniversary of September 11<sup>th</sup> in the Workplace

The anniversary of September 11<sup>th</sup> presents a unique challenge for managers and HR personnel in the workplace: how to support grieving employees, some of whom may be taken by surprise by the feelings they are suddenly re-experiencing, while being conscious of the need to continue business. Contrary to popular belief, grief is not a series of stages that must be worked through. Rather, it is an ongoing process that affects us differently—or more strongly—at different times. Knowing this, expect that some employees will need time to cope with resurfacing emotions that may be triggered by the anniversary of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Employees may feel distracted, less focused—and even vulnerable, frightened or depressed. As a result, work habits may be affected

and productivity may suffer. The following tips may help you support your employees during this difficult time:

- ♦ Be as flexible as possible with employees. Some employees may need time to manage their emotions and grief surrounding the anniversary. Effectively manage and support employees while also paying attention to the need to get on with the business of business.
- ♦ If possible, readjust deadlines or priorities to give employees time to grieve and remember the tragedy.
- ♦ Be sensitive to new employees who may not have strong support systems with co-workers.
- ♦ Locate or create support groups to help employees deal with the resurfacing emotions surrounding the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Support groups give one the opportunity to express feelings with other people who are willing to listen, and who are experiencing similar emotions.
- ♦ If your organization offers an EAP and/or work/life program, distribute brochures, flyers or other promotional materials to remind them of these helpful resources that can provide information and referrals on grief, managing work and life, stress management and more.
- ♦ If your organization experienced the loss of an employee in the attacks, consider having grief counselors available on-site on the anniversary to help employees cope.

## Remembering September 11<sup>th</sup> in the Workplace

Deciding whether to acknowledge the anniversary in your workplace is a decision that must be made individually based on your employees' needs and your business needs as an organization. If you do choose to memorialize the event, the following ideas may help:

- ♦ Consider organizing ways to help employees help others, such as a community service day, food drive, blood drive, etc.
- ♦ Donate money to charity from your organization and/or through employee contributions.

- ♦ Consider organizing a workplace memorial or schedule a special time (e.g., lunchtime, just before or after work) to gather employees to honor the victims who died or were injured.
- ♦ If your workplace was directly impacted, you may want to designate a specific place where co-workers can leave notes, flowers, pictures or other special items.
- ♦ Observe a moment of silence.
- ♦ Be supportive of employees who want to listen to the radio or watch coverage on television or during scheduled breaks.
- ♦ Remember to take care of yourself. As a manager, you will need to support your employees while coping with the tragedy as well. Take time out for yourself, network with other colleagues, and take advantage of the helpful services available to you.

## Helpful Resources

The following organizations can provide additional information on coping with grief and anxiety:

### **American Psychological Association**

750 First Street, N.E.  
Washington, D.C. 20002  
202-336-5500  
<http://www.apa.org/>

This nonprofit organization provides information and referrals to state associations that can help you find local clinical psychologists.

### **American Red Cross**

Information Hotline: 866-438-4636  
TDD: 800-526-1417  
<http://www.redcross.org>

American Red Cross operators are staffing the hotline 24 hours a day, seven days a week to provide callers with access to national and community resources for assistance with anxiety about terrorist threats.

### **National Anxiety Foundation**

3135 Custer Drive  
Lexington, KY 40517-4001  
606-272-7166  
<http://www.lexington-on-line.com/naf.html>

This site includes information on anxiety as well as links to other related resources.

### **National Institute of Mental Health**

Public Inquiries Office  
5600 Fishers Lane, Room 7C-02  
MSC 8030  
Bethesda, MD 20892-8030  
301-443-4513  
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>

Part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), this is a research institute that offers general publications on mental health disorders.

### **National Register of Health Care**

**Providers in Psychology**  
1120 G Street, N.W., Suite 330  
Washington, D.C. 20005  
202-783-7663

This organization provides listings of psychologists according to geographic area and specialty.

### **Project Liberty**

New York State Office of Mental Health  
New York City Field Office  
330 Fifth Avenue, 9<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10001  
866-270-9857  
<http://www.projectliberty.state.ny.us/>

Project Liberty offers information and provides free counseling services to anyone affected by the World Trade Center disaster and its aftereffects.

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